

MASTERS of

SCIENCE FICTION and FANTASY ART

ROCKPORT

by Karen Haber

Foreword by Joe Haldeman,
author of *The Forever War*

**A COLLECTION OF THE MOST INSPIRING SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY,
AND GAMING ILLUSTRATORS IN THE WORLD**

AVI KATZ

"Once you've become used to all the luxuries of digital painting, it's hard to imagine giving them up."



Captive. Watercolor/airbrush/colored pencil.



Tamara. Watercolor/airbrush/colored pencil. The artist created a series of portraits of biblical heroines based upon the Hebrew word for a female foreigner or alien, *nochria*. He depicted them literally as aliens from outer space. Katz called the series *Alien Core*, a reference to Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale*.

Avi Katz showed his promise early as a fantasy artist. When he was still a teenager in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, two families on his street paid top dollar for his babysitting services because he could draw images for the kids from *The Hobbit* by J. R. R. Tolkien. After a while, Katz sent a stack of the drawings off to Tolkien. He received an enthusiastic response from the author, who told him he was the first illustrator to portray the dwarves as Tolkien had intended. However, Tolkien also told him that his elves were all wrong.

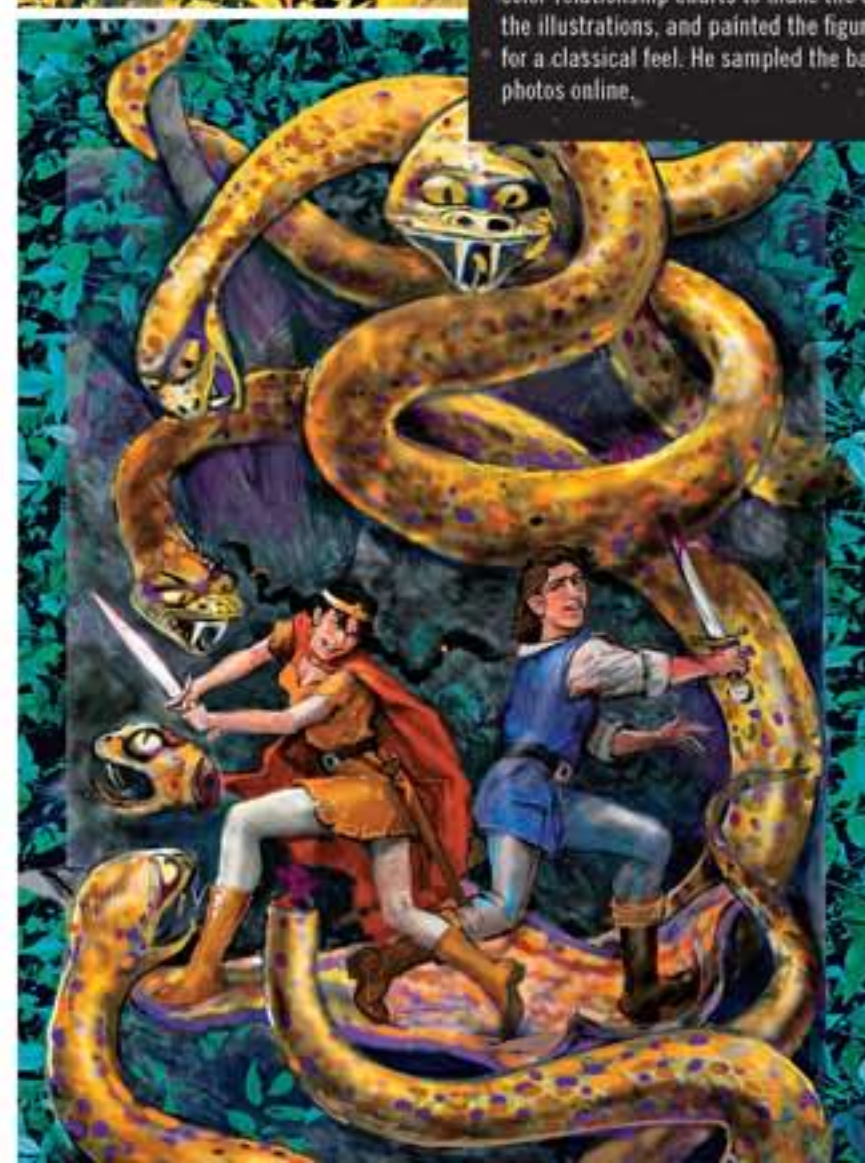
Undaunted, Katz continued the art studies he'd begun at age twelve when, encouraged by a mother who had attended art school, he applied for a model-drawing class at the Fleisher Art Memorial school, and overcame the teacher's reser-

ventions that he was too young to draw nudes. In 1967, he enrolled at the University of California at Berkeley and studied painting with photorealist Paul Sarkisian. As Katz puts it, "I was swept up in the sex-drugs-treason-rock music excitement of that unique time and place."

To avoid the U.S. draft and Vietnam War, he transferred to the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem—where his sister was studying—to finish his art degree. But he encountered opposition there to his interest in doing traditional figurative artwork. While some of his teachers, including Joseph Hirsch, Avraham Ofek, and John Byle, encouraged him, abstract art was in vogue, and most of the school's professors were unsympathetic to his goals.



Dragons Wrede. Pencil/pen/digital. Katz found inspiration for his dragons from illustrations by Maxfield Parrish and Kenneth Grahame. He devised complicated color-relationship charts to make the color schemes different but related among the illustrations, and painted the figures light on a dark background, aiming for a classical feel. He sampled the background texture of leaves from reference photos online.





Ezekiel. Digital.

Disillusioned, Katz dropped out and bounced around, landing back in Northern California, where he made some money painting portraits of children of well-to-do Bay Area parents. When he got tired of that, he went to the East Coast, where he showed his portfolio to the legendary science fiction editor John W. Campbell at *Analog* magazine. Although Campbell offered to try out the young artist on spot illustrations, Katz declined, hoisted his backpack, and continued his eastward travels, landing in Europe, and, finally back in Israel, where he settled and has lived ever since.

In the 1970s, Katz taught realistic painting and exhibited his work, which wasn't very fashionable at the time. "The critics wanted minimalism and conceptual art, but I wanted to tell stories with my art, as my favorite artists had. This was looked at with scorn in fine arts circles, but in illustration it was the name of the game. So I became a full-time illustrator."

Katz regularly provides cover art for science fiction and fantasy novels published by Oddysea, among them *Tales of the Dying Earth* by Jack Vance (2005), *The Gods Themselves* by Isaac Asimov (2005), *The Fountains of Paradise* by Arthur C. Clarke (2006), and the *Beggars* series by Nancy Kress (2005). In addition, he's provided covers for *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams (Keter, 1985 and 1986) and *The Enchanted Forest* series by Patricia Wrede (Opus Publishing, 2006 and 2007).

JOINING THE DIGITAL AGE

In the 1990s, Katz bid farewell to his reliance on the airbrush, gouache, colored pencil, and white acrylic. He recalls, "When Photoshop, Painter, and the Wacom stylus came along, the computer became a serious option for illustration." Katz created his first entirely digital piece, *King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*, in the mid-1990s, illustrated entirely in Painter on a Wacom. "My work now would be impossible without modern digital technology," he says. "I combine traditional drawing with computer tools."

He adds, "Sometimes the work is nearly finished on paper, scanned, and just toned or touched up in the computer. Sometimes the paper stage is just a sketch at the beginning and most of the painting is done in Photoshop and Painter with the Wacom. It varies."

Most of his illustrations begin as a pencil or pen-and-ink drawing on paper, which is then scanned. "I might also choose to do the drawing piecemeal, as separate elements which, once scanned, I manipulate and combine until they fit together. This approach saves a lot of time," he explains. "If I were doing this on paper I'd have to begin afresh or erase and redraw to move the pieces around."

"Once the drawing is in the computer, I can refine it and add color," Katz says. "Digital tools are especially convenient for mixing different techniques and elements. For example, it's simple to take pieces of photographs, stretch and cut

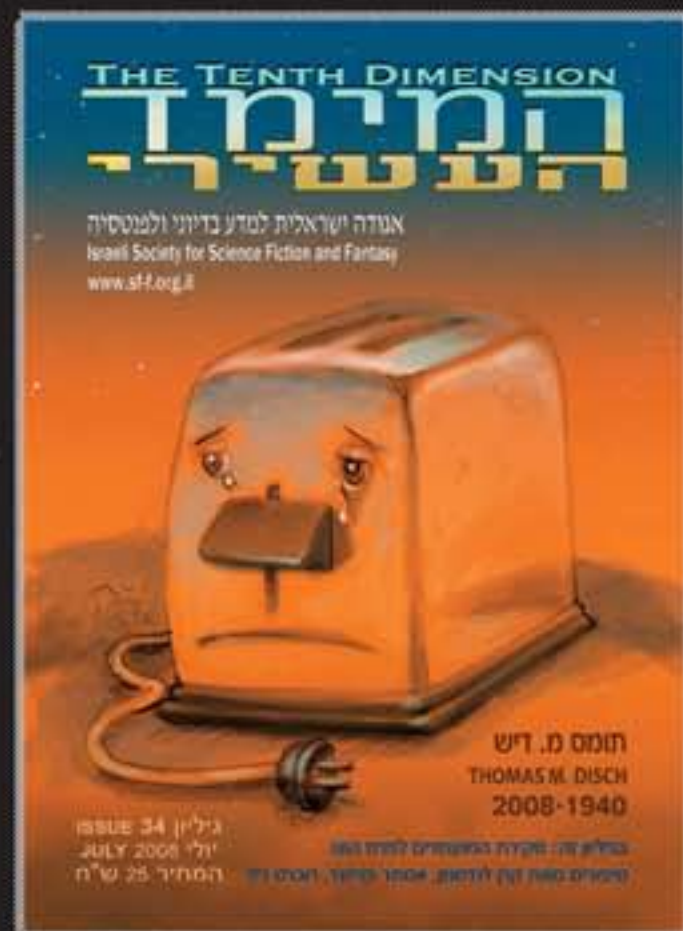


Hitchhiker. Mixed media on paper. These four book covers were originally painted together as a triptych, reading from right to left in Hebrew. When the fourth book, *So Long and Thanks for All the Fish*, was translated and published, the artist had to add a fourth cover, taking care to maintain the continuity of the background gradient. The paintings are precomputer, achieved with a mixture of airbrushed colored ink, gouache, and colored pencil. The starry sky is spattered with a toothbrush, and the various planets-cum-cricket balls are airbrushed using assorted coins and a draftsman's circle as templates.



Sci-Fi Stamps. Digital.

Created with Science Fiction Society president Dr. Emanuel Lottem, this series of postage stamps celebrates the millennium and science fiction in Israel. Each stamp shows a sequence of subjects ranging from legend to science fiction to technology, and the associated science fiction writer. In addition, Katz designed a first-day cover envelope design: a group of alien visitors landing at a science fiction convention in Israel, staring at a stone monolith inscribed "2001: Science Fiction and Fantasy in Israel" in Hebrew, Arabic, English, Klingon, and Tengwar.



Sad Toaster. Pencil/digital.



Snow. Pencil/digital.



Ruth. Watercolor/airbrush/colored pencil/acrylics. The watercolor pencils used here allow the artist to build details such as hair, clothing, and machinery quickly and soften them with water. The airbrush is used with a piece of scrap cardboard as a guiding edge, and allows him to define shapes and effects such as metallic sheen and transparency.



Shakespeare/Shex'pir. Digitally retouched photograph. "Every Star Trek aficionado knows the line from the sixth film in which Chancellor Gorkon says, 'You have not experienced Shakespeare until you have read it in the original Klingon.' For this magazine cover I took a portrait bust of Shakespeare and tweaked it in Photoshop until the face and dress became Klingon." The artist also notes the resemblance of the Bard's plumed pen to a *bat'leth*, the Klingon dueling weapon.

them to fit, and combine them with the drawing, whether as a collage or a seamless trompe l'oeil."

He admits to occasionally missing his old painting media and techniques. "I do make an effort to get back to traditional art media as much as I can," the artist says. "I long for the time when I'll be able to stop working twelve hours a day on commissions to make a living, and can go out with my folding easel, canvas, and box of acrylics like I used to. But once you've become used to moveable layers, copy and paste, scaling and warping, color-tuning, brush definition, and all the other luxuries of digital painting, it's hard to imagine giving them up."

In today's competitive art market, Katz wears many artistic hats: science fiction and fantasy cover artist, children's illustrator, editorial illustrator, and fine arts

portraitist. In his "day job," he illustrates the *Jerusalem Report*, a biweekly magazine of news and commentary. His work for the *Jerusalem Post* has been exhibited and republished around the world. Katz has also illustrated almost 200 children's books over the years. In 2010, he won the National Jewish Book Award for the *JPS Children's Illustrated Bible. The Adventures of Simon*, a comic book he wrote and drew, has been adopted by the U.N. and is being distributed throughout Africa.

To see more artwork by Avi Katz, please visit his website at www.avikatz.net.

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